

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A. BUDGET AND FUNDING

Even during times of fiscal constraint, the Work Group recommends that the County maintain funding for early childhood services, including full funding of the Montgomery County Child Care Resource and Referral Center (MCCCR&RC) and other programs that provide critical infrastructure support to a universal preschool program including child care provider training, licensing, accreditation, English language development, and support services in working with children with special needs.

For the future roll out of the Preschool for All initiative, the Work Group recommends that the County:

- **Keep pace with the State expansion of Preschool for All.**
- **Expand funding for Preschool for All services beyond State formulas to the extent necessary to implement the Work Group's recommendations.** Areas in need of enhancement may include teacher compensation, longevity incentives, transportation, and other service enhancements for at-risk children and their families.
- **Maximize available funding for programs by seeking public and private resources** including federal, state, and local funding streams, contributions from the business community, and foundation support.
- **Review the Working Parents Assistance program to ensure that participating families do not pay more than 10% of their income for child care. Advocate that the State implement this policy for the Purchase of Care child care subsidy program.** The Work Group discussed the importance of child care subsidies in making preschool services accessible to working, low-income parents. Because preschool program under Preschool for All run typically are 3 to 6 hours in length, some families need additional wrap around child care support because of their work hours. Child care subsidies allow the families to access licensed care at a higher cost than informal care; however, the family contribution for the State Purchase of Care and the County Working Parent Assistance can be onerous and can be 36% of a low income family's household income.
- **Advocate with policy makers at all levels to increase visibility and investment in early childhood education programs that support the development of young children and prepare them for school.**

B. LOCAL REVIEW PANEL

The State's Draft Business Plan provides for each local jurisdiction to designate a Local Review Panel (LRP) to provide county-wide coordination. The LRP will review and approve all applications made by providers interested in delivering Preschool for All Services.

The Work Group recommends that the LRP:

- Include representatives of the organizations included in this Work Group;
- Include at least two parent representatives;
- Include representatives of umbrella organizations representing the faith-based community and private child care providers including Montessori programs
- Include technical experts who have in-depth knowledge of quality early childhood education and care programs; and
- Publish findings from each community needs assessment as a part of the Request for Proposal process. (See the discussion of community needs assessment in the following section on Program Expansion.)
- Hold technical assistance meetings for potential Preschool for All applicants to clarify application processes, local requirements, and considerations for priority funding.

C. PROGRAM EXPANSION

The long term vision of the Work Group is to provide access to voluntary, quality preschool services in a variety of settings that meets the diverse needs of all four year old children and their families. The Work Group believes strongly that expanding preschool education options should be one component of how the County strengthens early childhood services to improve the school readiness of very young children from birth to age five across all developmental domains, e.g., language, literacy, physical, social, emotional and cognitive. **Existing services for the youngest children birth to age three should not be reduced in terms of funding or scope for the sake of providing expanded Preschool for All services for older children.**

Although the expansion of Preschool for All services in Montgomery County will be heavily influenced by the roll out of the program at the State level, the Work Group makes the following recommendations related to expanding publicly funded preschool services in Montgomery County:

- **Target initial expansion in areas of greatest need:** Because the scope of implementing Preschool for All in Montgomery County and the State will require enormous costs and multiyear logistical challenges, the Work Group has developed recommendations for initially expanding Preschool for All services, understanding that the goal of the program is to eventually reach all four year olds whose parents want services. **The Work Group recommends first focusing on areas with the greatest concentration of poverty rates as indicated by school FARMS rates.** Using this single criterion simplifies the process of targeting expansion areas and is highly correlated to other risk factors including limited English proficiency and mobility. This population is also at risk for having special needs.
- **Public funding to support children at or below 300% of federal poverty rate:** The Work Group recommends that public funds will initially support students whose family income is

at or below 300% of the federal poverty rate. This is consistent with the State's Draft Business Plan proposal. Currently, jurisdictions are mandated under the Bridge to Excellence Act to provide preschool services to all children whose family incomes are at or below 185% of the federal poverty rate.

- **Preference to children in the school attendance areas:** The Work Group recommends that preference for services at community-based expansion sites should first go to children who live in the designated school attendance areas. Each expansion site must maintain the minimum number of income-eligible children as required by the State, and only income-eligible children will be supported with public funding. Non-income eligible children who live in the attendance area may receive services for pay, as vacancies permit.

The Work Group felt it important to (1) treat community members consistently in targeted communities, (2) allow child care providers to integrate the Preschool for All framework into existing child care programs which include private pay slots, and (3) reduce attempts to bypass the order of expansion by families who live in other neighborhoods not yet targeted for Preschool for All services. Acknowledging that it is in the interests of the program to fill all slots and that needy children live in areas all over the County beyond the areas initially targeted for expansion, **the Work Group recommends that providers may move beyond the specified community for income eligible applicants after first reasonably exhausting efforts to serve children in the school attendance area.**

- **A measured approach to expansion in targeted areas:** The Work Group recommends growing capacity in individual communities at a gradual pace. This approach is recommended to avoid having unused capacity in Preschool for All programs. The Work Group believes that a paced approach maximizes the ability to fill publicly funded preschool slots. It also allows child care providers to adapt to the changing needs of the population and thus avoids sudden negative and unforeseen consequences to both providers and families.
- **Match State funds for the delivery of Preschool for All services:** The County will be required to provide matching funds in order to make use of State funding. The Work Group recommends that the County make these matching funds available as State funding becomes available. In addition, the Work Group encourages the Council to work with the State delegation to ensure that funding formulas equitably distributed available funding to the County and to implement policy recommendations for the State program made by the Work Group.
- **Perform a community needs assessment in each area of expansion:** Prior to soliciting applications for delivering Preschool for All services, the Work Group recommends that the LRP conduct a needs assessment that assesses for the community (1) the existing capacity of accredited providers, (2) the capacity of accredited providers to expand services in the targeted area, (3) the quality of existing child care programs, (3) the available inventory of public and private space for delivering programming, (4) feedback from parents, and (5) cost considerations for parents related to different program options. The information collected by the LRP will ultimately inform the selection of qualified Preschool for All providers and ensure that programs meet the needs of parents and the community.

- **The community needs assessment will lead to the development of a menu of services to be targeted for expansion and a strategy for growing the capacity of quality preschool services for each community.** The menu may include both full day and part day options. The Work Group has reviewed research that shows that there are benefits from both full and half day programs and has heard from parents about interest in having options for both types of programs. The Work Group recognizes the need to have full day programs with wrap around child care to allow children whose parents work full time to access Preschool for All services.
- **The community needs assessment will also be used to determine where additional services are needed.** For example, the Preschool for All proposed by the State is consistent with the school year program of 180 days. For summer months, families will be linked to existing programs with their current preschool providers or with other service providers in the community. However, if extraordinary circumstances require, the LRP could identify the need for a longer program.
- **Work with the whole community of qualified providers:** The Work Group recommends that the LRP work with the whole community of qualified preschool providers to meet the demand for high quality services. Expanding to services to all four year-olds whose families request them will require working with qualified providers in diverse settings. The effort may require innovative programming and collaborative partnerships among different organizations. The LRP should explore and encourage all options, including partnerships that will contribute to providing quality services to preschool children.

D. AUXILIARY SERVICES

The State requires screening and referral services covering vision, hearing, speech and language, health and physical development. Other auxiliary services must be offered, but the State leaves the determination of which specific services to local jurisdictions. Work Group members have noted that the requirements related to support services and their funding continue to be developed at the Federal and State levels.

In identifying auxiliary services that should be made available to families, the Work Group makes the following recommendations:

- **Offering parent involvement opportunities should be a requirement of each program.** As a part of the application process, programs should explain/demonstrate how they will keep parents engaged and involved. Parent involvement has been shown in research to contribute to student success in the early grades.
- **Programs should be required to provide or arrange for general screenings to all four-year olds sufficient to identify children that need additional services and to refer them to appropriate service providers.**

- **Providers must demonstrate how they would deliver or link children and families with auxiliary services.** Services are not required to be provided on site, but programs should be required to refer families to appropriate services. The provider may demonstrate an established relationship or affiliation with an auxiliary services provider or a means of accessing services.
- **Training resources are needed to help preschool providers link families to appropriate services.** Providers need (1) to understand how to conduct or arrange for development screenings; (2) to navigate social service systems and understand what services are available for families in the community and how to make referrals for services; (3) to use existing services/resources like InfoMontgomery and ChildLink; and (4) to be able to identify families who need support services. Although there is training available to providers to conduct developmental screenings, additional funding may be required and could be provided through enhancements grants under Preschool for All.
- **There is a need for increased funding to keep up with demand for auxiliary services generated by Preschool for All providers.** The Work Group anticipates that State funded services like the Mental Health Consultation Project will be in greater demand as Preschool for All services expand. Likewise, the demand for locally funded family support services may also increase as providers are encouraged and trained to refer families for services. **The Work Group recommends that an assessment be completed to determine what level of additional funding will be needed.**
- **Service providers that have the capacity to provide or connect a broad range of students (e.g., special needs, bilingual, etc.) with services should be given some preference in the application and selection process.**

E. TRANSPORTATION

Although the State does not require transportation for preschool services under COMAR, the Work Group recommends that the County develop a transportation plan for Preschool for All Services as a long-term goal. **As a matter of policy, the Work Group believes that access to transportation should be a component of quality programs and recognizes that many families would not access preschool if transportation was not available.**

Recommendations related to a transportation system are as follows:

- **Transportation service should will follow the same priority rollout as the Preschool for All program income eligibility where children whose income falls below 300% of the federal poverty level will not be required to pay for the transportation service.**
- The system could include fee collection for participants whose household income exceeds 300% of the federal poverty level.
- In designing a transportation system, the Council and the Executive Branch may want to explore the costs of and different options for providing transportation services, assess the

local transportation infrastructure, and examine how transportation is provided in other jurisdictions to deliver universal preschool services.

F. PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The State will have the primary responsibility to monitor and collect evaluation information from programs that participate in Preschool for All. Nevertheless, the Work Group recommends that as a policy, **the County monitor the success of the children who are participating in the Preschool for All program, and other programmatic aspects that reflect on high-quality care and education.**

G. TEACHER COMPENSATION

The State Draft Business Plan proposes a salary schedule for teachers participating in Preschool for All which is based on an average of the first five years of a public school teacher's salary across all jurisdictions in Maryland. The State has suggested that programs will be required pay their teachers this base salary or higher based on experience and education. The State has said that local jurisdictions may add additional funding to raise teacher compensation to be consistent with local public school salaries and benefits if the local average is higher than the average across all Maryland jurisdictions.

The Work Group makes the following recommendation regarding teacher compensation¹:

- **Work with MSDE to advocate the adoption of a regional system of market-based pay and benefits, as it has for child care subsidies.** For Montgomery County, a regional system is preferable to a statewide average, which would not recognize the added costs of living and teaching in our area.
- **If the State is not willing to adopt regional pay formulas, the County Government should consider supplementing State-provided teacher incentives to bring compensation of qualified providers up to the average compensation of MCPS teachers in their first five years.**
- **Any system of pay and benefits should be based on equal pay for comparable education and professional certification levels.** Considerations of equity suggest the need to pay teachers on a scale comparable to that of public school teachers. Paying preschool teachers less than public school teachers will affect the program's ability to recruit and retain high quality teachers. The State Business Plan suggests that there will be a phase-in period during which certification requirements may be waived for teachers delivering Preschool for All services. In this case, the Work Group believes that compensation should be tiered based on actual education and certification levels achieved.

¹ Any implementation program would honor and comply with current collective bargaining agreements, as applicable.

H. PREPARING HIGHLY QUALIFIED PROVIDERS

In order to achieve the vision of Preschool for All and an integrated network of services for all young children, the Work Group emphasizes the need to build on the existing professional development system for early childhood providers. The Work Group advocates for a holistic approach to increasing the ability of providers across all levels to deliver quality preschool services. In addition to increasing accessible and affordable training opportunities, the system should provide supports that allow providers to access training opportunities, ensure sufficient outreach to make opportunities known to the provider community, and accommodate the cultural and linguistic diversity of providers. Professional development opportunities should be available to move providers up the ladder beginning at the lowest level, to the educator beginning a 4 year degree, up to and including certified teachers.

- **Grow the pool of high-quality preschool providers by all effective means.**
- **Increase funding to programs that support professional development, credentialing, certification, and accreditation.** Additional funding is needed for scholarships, technical assistance, substitutes, and program enhancements including equipment and supplies. **Existing professional development and scholarship funds serving providers of all age groups should be maintained and not be supplanted in favor of supporting providers serving primarily four year olds.**
- **Give preference for use of expanded professional development funding to preschool providers serving in high needs areas, with priority for child care providers closest to certification for center-based programs and family child care providers closest to national accreditation.**
- **Give incentives to highly qualified preschool providers who continue to serve high needs areas.**
- **Advocate for increased State funding to support provider training and professional development:**
 - Set aside a portion of Hoyer professional development grants to support regional trainings on curriculum use and Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR).
 - Support for an early education cohort through Columbia Union College.
 - Increase state systems to allow expedient accreditation, credentialing and training.

I. CERTIFICATION WAIVER AND HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Currently the higher education system in Montgomery County does not accommodate child care providers seeking a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and certification that satisfies the requirement of Universal Preschool. There are some programs that offer early childhood education degrees, but certification consistent with State requirements is not offered. Certification programs that cover Pre-K through 3rd grade do not qualify center-based child care providers to work with children ages 0-3. The County also lacks availability of flexibly-

scheduled or on-line early childhood courses and student teaching opportunities with children under 5.

- **Encourage the State and higher education institutions to develop a higher education system that meets the needs of the County's early childhood workforce**, includes college coursework that is flexibly scheduled (e.g., weekend or evening coursework, on-line opportunities, accelerated formats, etc.) and provides opportunities for providers to pursue four-year degrees related to early childhood education and development. The system should also address barriers related to articulation for existing course work and associate degrees and options for student teaching practica in viable settings (e.g., child care centers). **Local funding may be required to support the development of and accessibility to programs that help motivated, under-qualified providers achieve highly qualified status.**
- **Encourage the State to establish a certification for providers working with children from birth to age five and clarify the practicum and professional development school expectations for providers in working with this age group.**
- **Encourage that the State and the higher education system to explore the possibility of awarding alternative credits that can be counted toward higher education degrees or certification.** It may be that experienced providers may be able to receive credits for demonstrated competence in delivering quality early childhood education over a defined period of time or may receive credit retroactively for early childhood coursework that was previously designated non-credit.
- **Encourage MSDE to develop capacity to review foreign credentials of teachers coming from other countries.**
- **Allow a time-limited waiver of certification requirements with clear deadlines to providers delivering Preschool for All services consistent with State requirements.** Certification should ultimately be required for teachers delivering Preschool for All services to ensure the quality of services to children. The length of the waiver period should be based on an analysis of responses to the Higher Education Needs Assessment Survey that would consider (1) the number of certified providers able to deliver Preschool for All Services, (2) the demand of children need Preschool for All services, (3) the demand for higher education services, (4) the feasibility of providing higher education programs that are tailored to the needs of the workforce, and (5) the accessibility of programs for providers.
- **Designate a group to follow up on issues related certification waivers and developing higher education opportunities.** The group should include representatives from the Universities at Shady Grove, Montgomery College, Columbia Union College, the MCCR&RC, and MSDE. The group would be responsible for analyzing data generated by the Higher Education Needs Assessment, exploring the development of programming that meets the needs of existing providers, and evaluating the costs of programming. The group should solicit input on their planning efforts from existing providers.

J. CRITERIA FOR SELECTING PROVIDERS

The Work Group recommends the following criteria for selection providers of Preschool for All services:

- **Ability to meet MSDE requirements identified in the Preschool for All Report that are aligned with COMAR.**
- **Quality of the proposal and its responsiveness to the needs of the community as identified in the Request for Proposal.**
- **The capacity of the program to deliver services.**
- **The cost effectiveness of services proposed.**

The Work Group also recommends that some preference in the selection process be given to providers who demonstrate the ability to work with diverse populations, e.g., English Language Learners and children with special needs.

K. FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS

The Work Group recognizes that the faith community represents an important segment of the preschool provider community. **The Work Group recommends making explicit the eligibility of faith-based programs to participate in Preschool for All and requiring that faith-based program comply with all Preschool for All requirements.**

L. FAMILY CHILD CARE NETWORKS

The State Task Force included networks of family child care providers in its proposed system of delivering Preschool for All services. The Work Group supports the development of family child care networks or other models that ensure the delivery of quality programming by family child care providers.

The concept of family child care networks is in the development stage at the State, and additional guidance from MSDE on the following topics is appropriate: What are the minimum requirements for family child care providers to deliver universal preschool services? How must family child care networks be structured, and what functions must they perform?

In the absence of specific mandates related to family child care networks, the Work Group makes the following recommendations:

- **Family child care providers delivering Preschool for All services must be nationally accredited through the National Association of Family Child Care.**
- **The County should develop a pilot model for delivering Preschool for All services through family child care providers that aligns with the state requirements.**

Opportunities to provide instruction in the home environment and to have mentors support providers with technical assistance should be incorporated into the pilot. Additional research into the delivery of preschool services through family child care networks in other jurisdictions may be useful in developing a local pilot program.

M. COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH PLAN

The Work Group emphasizes the need for the Council to develop a rigorous communication and outreach plan, which will educate: (1) the community about the importance and effectiveness of preschool programs; (2) child care providers about the opportunities and requirement for delivering Preschool for All services; (3) parents about opportunities and eligibility for services; and (4) businesses about the impact of child care opportunities on their workforce and the opportunities to participate in and support this initiative.

The following points summarize the group's recommendations related to a Communication and Outreach Plan:

- Designate the Early Childhood Congress (ECC) to help deliver the message regarding Preschool for All.
- Use existing outlets and technology (e.g., website, youtube, podcasts, cable TV, radio, ethnic radio, press, etc.) to disseminate information and target particular audiences.
- Perform outreach to the business community including a standing business panel of Early Childhood Congress, County Chambers of Commerce including local and ethnic affiliations, and Montgomery County Business Roundtable for Education. Engage the business community in a variety of ways matched to its interests (e.g., training, space, funding scholarships or children, etc.)
- Perform outreach to the faith community and religious institutions including Interfaith Works, Action in Montgomery, County Executive Office of Community Partnerships, etc.
- Make presentations to and solicit the support and feedback of other community groups, e.g., Committee for Montgomery, NAACP, civic associations, MCCPTA, Upcounty Latino Network, etc.
- Perform outreach to and educate parents through the MCCCR&R center, schools, and family support programs.
- Offer technical assistance to help preschool providers understand the opportunities to deliver Preschool for All services and the support that is available for credentialing, certification, and accreditation.